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23 December 2005
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Confirmation to follow
CONFIRMATION

IP Australia
P O Box 200
Woden, ACT 2606
AUSTRALIA

Attention: Matthew Hollingworth

re: Eurekster, Inc
International Application No. PCT/NZ2004/000228
Enhanced Search Engine
Our Ref: 43043x344 / 57 LR

CHRISTCHURCH OFFICE
Level II, PricewaterhouseCoopers Centre
119 Armagh Street
Christchurch
PHONE +64 3 379 3684
FAX +64 3 379 8220
EMAIL christchurch@jaws.co.nz
HOMEPAGE www.jaws.co.nz
POST PO Box 2201
Christchurch, New Zealand
DX WP20323, Christchurch

AUCKLAND OFFICE
PHONE +64 9 914 6740
FAX +64 9 914 6780
POST Private Bag 11907
Ellerslie, Auckland, New Zealand
DX CP34005, Auckland
HAMILTON OFFICE
PHONE +64 7 857 5660
FAX +64 7 957 5681
POST Private Bag 3140
Hamilton, New Zealand
DX GX10012, Hamilton

TAURANGA OFFICE
PHONE +64 7 578 4666
FAX +64 7 578 4001
POST PO Box 13365
Tauranga, New Zealand
DX HP40037, Tauranga

Thank you for your second written opinion with respect to the above application.

In response, the applicant has amended claim 1 to read as follows: (Additions underlined)

"A search engine system capable of displaying indicative information including search suggestions to a user derived from searches performed by one or more entities connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said search suggestions include recent searches and/or popular searches performed by said entities."

A copy of the claims, including amended claim 1 and consequential amendments to dependent claims 15 and 17 is attached in both clean and tracked forms. The corresponding amendments to the description on page 5 is also enclosed.

Corrections to typographical errors in claims 80 and 84 are also included.

It will be noted that the amendments to claim 1 emphasis key novel inventive differences of the present invention over the citations. The indicative information

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has been further defined in claim 1 to include *suggestions* in the form of *recent searches* and/or *popular searches*. It should be noted that these *suggestions* displayed to the user are based on the searches, i.e. keywords and the like inputted by entities connected to the user and not from the search results as used in the D1 citation.

Indeed, the whole thrust of D1 is management of search results obtained by the user's contacts with further active rating required by these users to rate the result in some manner.

This is in complete contrast with the present invention where no such active rating is mandatory and indeed the *suggestions* displayed to the user are compiled passively from the search keywords themselves and do not require any further action from the user. It will be appreciated that every search requires some form of keyword or search term input from the user and this constitutes the minimum form of active input a user can provide. The requirement of D1 that each of the user's contacts to rate their search results is far more onerous and far less likely to be implemented by the majority of users. The present invention thus achieves a far more effective result by collating the recent or popular searches by members of their personal network and displaying same to stimulate the user's curiosity or interest to perform similar searches.

There is no suggestion in D1 or any of the other citations of a means of displaying such suggestions based on the searches of the user's contacts and we thus submit that claim 1 and all dependent claims are thus novel and inventive.

By way of background information, we enclose an article (also available at: <http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/article.php/3301481>) by a noted internet search engine authority describing the present invention and its advantages over the prior art.

We trust the above submissions overcome the current objections and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
JAMES & WELLS



PP **Andy Cable**
Senior Associate
andyc@jaws.co.nz

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It is acknowledged that the term 'comprise' may, under varying jurisdictions, be attributed with either an exclusive or an inclusive meaning. For the purpose of this specification, and unless otherwise noted, the term 'comprise' shall have an inclusive meaning - i.e. that it will be taken to mean an inclusion of not only the

5 listed components it directly references, but also other non-specified components or elements. This rationale will also be used when the term 'comprised' or 'comprising' is used in relation to one or more steps in a method or process.

It is an object of the present invention to address the foregoing problems or at least to provide the public with a useful choice.

10 Further aspects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the ensuing description which is given by way of example only.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

According to one aspect, there is provided a search engine system capable of displaying *indicative information* including search suggestions to a user derived

15 from searches performed by one or more entities connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said search *suggestions* include *recent searches* and/or *popular searches* performed by said entities.

In one embodiment, said entities are '*user contacts*'.

According to a further aspect, the present invention includes a system providing

20 the user with a private *personal contacts network* of *user contacts*.

As used herein, the term 'entity' or 'entities' refers to any individual, family, personal or *organised network*, organisation, club, society, company, partnership, religion, or entity that exists as a particular and discrete unit.

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CLAIMS:

1. A search engine system capable of displaying *indicative information* including search *suggestions* to a user derived from searches performed by one or more entities connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said search *suggestions* include *recent searches and/or popular searches* performed by said entities.
2. A search engine system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said entities are denoted as '*user contacts*'.
3. A search engine system as claimed in claim 2, wherein, each *user contact* includes a *connection factor* indicative of the degree of separation between the *user contact* and the user.
4. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 2-3, wherein at least one user is provided with an interface between said search engine system and with a *private personal contacts network of user contacts* unique to said user.
5. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 2-3, including a *private personal contacts network of user contacts* accessible by at least one user.
6. A search engine system as claimed in claim 5, wherein each said *private personal contacts network* is unique to an individual user.
7. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-6, wherein said *private personal contacts network* provides *interrelationship context information* between said entities.

8. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-6, wherein said *private personal contacts network* provides *interrelationship context information* between a *user contact* and the user.
9. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-8, wherein said *interrelationship context information* includes said *connection factor*.
10. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-9, wherein said *interrelationship context information* includes one or more *entity attributes*.
11. A search engine system as claimed in claim 10, wherein said system *entity attributes* include at least one *identifying characteristic*.
12. A search engine system as claimed in claim 10, wherein said system *entity attributes* includes information regarding personal details, interests; friends; relations; school alumni; employment factors; business colleagues; professional acquaintances; sexual preferences, persuasions, or proclivities; sporting interests; entertainment, artistic, creative or leisure interests; travel interests, commercial, religious, political, theological or ideological belief or opinions; academic, scientific, or engineering disciplines; humanitarian, social, security/military or economic fields and any combination of same.
13. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said *searches* include any interrogation of a database via a network, including a search of web-sites via the internet.
14. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein each search includes user-inputted *keywords* and an output listing of *search results*.

15. A search engine system as claimed in claim 14, wherein said *recent searches* denote recent *keywords or search results* associated with the *keywords* used by the *user contacts* and said *popular searches* denote a ranking of the most popular *keywords or search results* associated with the *keywords* used by the *user contacts*,
16. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said *indicative information* includes search results *weighting*.
17. A search engine system as claimed in claim 14, wherein said *suggestions* include at least one of:
 - *recent web-sites* denoting recent web sites accessed by the *user contacts* either directly, or via *recent searches*;
 - *popular web-sites* denoting a ranking of web sites most regularly visited by, and/or recommended by the *user contacts*;
 - *high-flying searches* denoting a list of *keywords or search results* associated with the *keywords* ranked according to their rate of increase in the *popular searches* ranking;
 - *high-flying web-sites* denoting a list of web-sites ranked according to their rate of increase in the *popular web-sites* ranking;
 - *popular or recently accessed paid web listings*.
18. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 15-17, wherein the *suggestions* are based on a *selective input* from the *user contacts*.
19. A search engine system as claimed in claim 18, wherein said *selective input* is filtered according to at least one *filter criteria* including elapsed

period since the *suggestion creation*, the *interrelationship context information*, the *connection factor* and/or *entity attributes* of the user contact.

20. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 7-19, wherein said *interrelationship context information* includes a *connection factor* indicative of the separation between *user contacts* in said *private personal contacts network*.
21. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 7-19, wherein, access to the *interrelationship context information* between the user and said entities is restricted.
22. A search engine system as claimed in claim 21, wherein said restricted access is defined by the user.
23. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 11-23, wherein said *identifying characteristic* includes at least one of the group including; the entity's name, means of contacting the entity, including an e-mail address; telephone and/or facsimile number; postal address and/or any communication means capable of individually communicating with the entity or any combination of same.
24. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 11-24, wherein said *identifying characteristics* includes at least one said *entity attribute*.
25. A search engine system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said *identifying characteristics* include *supplementary attributes* of said user.
26. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein entities agreeing to inclusion in a user's *personal contacts*

network are said to be *direct user contacts*.

27. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein two entities linked through any number of intermediate entities are defined as "connected".
28. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein two entities existing independently in a *personal contact network* without any intermediate connecting entities are defined as "disconnected".
29. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 3-28, wherein said *connection factor* includes a *connection path length* between two entities, given by the minimum possible number of connections in a chain of entities separating said two entities.
30. A search engine system as claimed in claim 29, wherein the said *connection factor* is equal to the shortest *connection path length* of all the available *connection paths* between the entities.
31. A search engine system as claimed in claim 29 or 30, wherein an entity that is directly connected to another entity is said to be a *direct contact* giving a "1st degree contact," and has a *connection path length* of one; two entities connected via one intermediate entity are said to be "2nd degree contacts," and have a *connection path length* of two, and wherein any two entities whose shortest connection path is via "N-1" intermediate entities (if any), with a path length of "N" are an "Nth" degree contact, where "N" is an integer.

32. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 29-31, wherein entities having a 2nd or higher degree contact are termed *indirect contacts*, or indirectly connected.
33. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 29-32, wherein said system is configured to allow a user to apply a *selective input* to the user's *suggestions* by using a *filter criteria* for controlling the Nth degree contact of entities to be included, where N is a variable determined by the user.
34. A search engine system as claimed in claim 33, wherein the *filter criteria* for said *selective input* is linked to a *predetermined activity*.
35. A search engine system as claimed in claim 33, wherein a user engaged in one or more said *predetermined activities* may specify the action to apply to:
 - all degrees of contact in the user's *personal contacts network*, at any *connection path length*, or
 - all *user contacts*, including those disconnected from the user.
36. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 33-35, wherein said *selective input* is receivable from networks outside the system network.
37. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 33-36, wherein said *suggestions* are a weighted average of *direct contacts* and *indirect contacts*.

38. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 33-36, wherein the *selective input* is user-definable.
39. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 15-38, wherein *user contacts* associated with the *suggestions* most frequently chosen by a user are designated *preferred user contacts*.
40. A search engine system as claimed in claim 39, wherein said designation of *preferred user contact* is performed directly by the user, or calculated by the system by determining the *user contact* associated with the most popular *suggestions* previously selected by the user.
41. A search engine system as claimed any one of claims 39-40, wherein the *selective input* may be at least partially weighted by *suggestions* from the *preferred user contacts*.
42. A search engine system as claimed any one of claims 39-40, wherein the *selective input* is varied according to factors associated with the *user contact*, including the *interrelationship context information*, the *connection factor* and/or *entity attributes* associated with the contributing *user contact*.
43. A search engine system as claimed any one of claims 39-42, wherein the *search results* associated with a *keyword* may be weighted according to a *selective input* from the *user contacts*.
44. A search engine system as claimed in claim 43, wherein said *selective input* from the *user contacts*, includes *filter criteria* related to the *interrelationship context information*, the *connection factor* and/or *entity attributes* associated with the *user contact*.

45. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein a *user contact* who last performed a search, or recommended a particular web-site/search result is contactable via a link adjacent to the *keyword search terms and/or web-sites*.
46. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein a *partner web-site* is given a unique link to the search engine, configured such that users clicking on the search engine link are linked to a search page with the participating *partner web-site* listed as the top of the *popular searches and/or recent web-sites suggestions listing*.
47. A search engine system as claimed in claim 46, wherein said *partner web-sites* include a link to the search engine web-site whereby both web-sites are listed under the *suggestions* at both websites.
48. A search engine system as claimed in either claim 46 or claim 47, wherein said *partner web-site* displays a list of *suggestions* obtained from the generic search activities of all *partner web-site* users.
49. A search engine system as claimed in either claim 45-46, wherein said *partner web-site* displays a list of *suggestions* for users having their own *private personal contacts network* obtained from the *suggestions* associated by the activities of their *user contacts* on the *partner web-site*.
50. A search engine system as claimed in claims 14-49, wherein on a commercial web-site, a *recommendation* to related products to the *keywords* being searched for which were bought, viewed, subscribed to may be made by previous *user contacts* to the site.

51. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein provided to a user as a toolbar.
52. A search engine system as claimed in claim 51, wherein said tool bar monitors web-sites accessed by the user directly without conducting a *keyword* search as an input to the *suggestions* data and *search weightings*.
53. A search engine system as claimed in claim 51 or claim 52, wherein said tool bar may also display or provide access to the most recent *suggestions* data from the *user contacts*.
54. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 51-53, wherein upon accessing a web-site, the user is optionally notified by the toolbar of their *user contacts* who visited that site.
55. A search engine system as claimed in claim 53, wherein upon accessing a web-site, the user is optionally notified which subsequent sites the *user contact* accessed.
56. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the search engine is configured to provide the user with *notifications* of further specified occurrences, including access of a specified (or book-marked) web-site by a *user contact* and/or an associated *recommendation* to same, or further sites accessed after the book-marked site, or of any new material at, or links to, the specified site.
57. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the search engine includes means for linking an *appraisal* with a search result and/or *suggestion*.

58. A search engine system as claimed in claim 57, wherein said *appraisal* may include an (optionally graded) *recommendation* and/or *user comments*.
59. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-58, wherein said *appraisals* are performed via links associated with individual results on *search results listing*.
60. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-58, wherein said appraisals are be performed whilst accessing the search result or *suggestion web-site* via a link to the search engine.
61. A search engine system as claimed in claim 58, wherein the *user comments* are unrestricted typed comments and/or selected from a predetermined list of *appraisal gradings*.
62. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-61, wherein said user *recommendations* are used as a factor in *weighting the search results*.
63. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-61, wherein users are accorded a predetermined number of *recommendations* according to a predetermined user *recommendation credibility* criteria.
64. A search engine system as claimed in claim 63, wherein said *recommendation credibility* may be determined by active or automatic *affirmations* of said user *recommendations* by the *user contacts*.
65. A search engine system as claimed in claim 63, wherein *recommendation credibility* criteria may include a fixed quota of *recommendations* over a

specified time period, or linked to particular *entity attributes* for *recommendations* for web-sites associated with said *entity attributes*.

66. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said system is user-configurable to provide the ability for a user to delete *searches* or web-activity from incorporation in said *indicative information*.
67. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein each user is provided with an editable *history log* of previous *searches* they have performed and web-sites accessed.
68. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 15-67, wherein users can submit *recommendations* for sites limited to specific *keywords*.
69. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 10-67, wherein the *weighting* of individual *user contacts* may be passively/automatically or actively adjusted based on criteria defined by the user including usefulness of the *user contact's* browsing, reliability of results, personal tastes, and/or any *entity attribute* known to the system.
70. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, incorporating a book-marking system, whereby a user accessing a given web-site may use a book-marking feature on the search engine web-site to add the bookmarked web-site to a compilation list of other bookmarked sites.
71. A method of *brokering* services utilising a search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, said services being provided by a *partner web-site* or *broker* acting as an intermediary between

advertisers and *partner web-sites* and/or websites featuring the search engine system and including the provision of *suggestions* relevant to the advertiser product(s), service(s), web-site(s), or company(ies) on said *partner web-site*, and/or the search engine.

72. A method as claimed in claim 71 wherein a *partner web-site* offers said service directly to advertisers or representatives of advertisers.
73. A method as claimed in claim 71 or claim 72 wherein said offer of *suggestion(s)* to the advertiser is made available to all or a subset of the users of the *partner web-site*.
74. A method as claimed in any one of claims 71-73, wherein said *suggestion(s)* are *recommendations*.
75. A method as claimed in any one of claims 71-74, wherein said *suggestion(s)* would be displayed to those *partner web-site* users who had previously accessed related *suggestion(s)*.
76. A method as claimed in claim 71, wherein said *brokering service* is provided between advertisers and *partner web-sites*.
77. A method as claimed in claim 76, wherein said *partner web-sites* provide access to their users for the displaying of *suggestions* and distribution of *recommendations* without said *partner web-sites* being involved in the selection of advertisers and *suggestions*
78. A method as claimed in claim 71, wherein said *brokering service* are provided to other *brokers* or companies providing internet-searching advertising, whereby sponsored search results are offered to advertisers at fixed-price or via auction in exchange for providing the advertiser a

negotiated ranking position in a *keyword* search results presented to a users performing a search on the *keyword* purchased by the advertiser.

79. A method as claimed in claim 78, wherein said services further include the ability for advertisers to bid for, or buy the rights to be included in *suggestions* to *partner website* users, individual users and/or search engine system users who have previously accessed similar, related or identical *suggestions* or *recommendations*.
80. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 1 – 70 capable of displaying *indicative information* to a user from *searches* performed by entities (or '*user contacts*') connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said system includes;
 - at least one host computer processor connectable to one or more network(s),
 - a database accessible over said network(s),
 - a plurality of data input devices connectable to said network(s),
 - a search engine accessible over said network(s),
 - wherein said system is capable of forming said private *personal contacts network* for each of one or more users by receiving input from the said user including at least one identifying characteristic of the user and of one or more chosen entities known to said user,
 - recording said identifying characteristic of each entity including the user to form one or more corresponding entity data records in said database,

- notifying the or each chosen entity of their recordal on said system and requesting input of at least one identifying characteristic of one or more further entities known to the or each said chosen entity,
- recording the identifying characteristic of each further entity inputted by the or each said chosen entity to form further corresponding entity data records,
- repeating the above steps of successive notification of further entities and recordal of the identifying characteristic of each further entity chosen as further entity data records,
- providing searchable access to at least part of the entity data records stored in said database and to the internet.

81. A search engine system as claimed in claim 80, wherein said searchable access to an entity data record may be restricted by the entity to said *user contacts*.

82. A search engine system as claimed in claims 80 or claim 81, wherein said data input devices include computer terminals, PDAs, telephones, mobile phones, laptops, notebooks, any other portable personal computing device connectable to said network.

83. A search engine system as claimed in claim 82, wherein said data input devices provide at least one of webpage, e-mail, text message, DTMF tone, voice or video access to the said host computer or between entities and/or web-browsing access to said host computer via a dedicated website interface.

84. A method of creating a private *personal contacts network* for interaction with a search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 1 – 70 or 80 - 83, said method including the steps performed by a processor of a data processing and storage system, of:

- receiving input from the said user including at least one *identifying characteristic* of the user and at least one chosen entity known to said user and hereinafter referred to as a *user contact*;
- recording said *identifying characteristic* of each *user contact* including the user to form at least one corresponding *user contact* data record in said database;
- notifying the or each *user contact* of their recordal on said system and requesting input of at least one identifying characteristic of at least one further entity known to the *user contact*;
- recording the identifying characteristic of each further entity inputted by the or each *user contact* to form further corresponding *user contact* data records;
- repeating the above steps of successive notification of further entities and recordal of the identifying characteristic of each further entity chosen as further *user contact* data records;
- providing searchable access to at least part of the *user contact* data records stored in said database.

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5 listed components it directly references, but also other non-specified components or elements. This rationale will also be used when the term 'comprised' or 'comprising' is used in relation to one or more steps in a method or process.

It is an object of the present invention to address the foregoing problems or at least to provide the public with a useful choice.

10 Further aspects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the ensuing description which is given by way of example only.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

According to one aspect, there is provided a search engine system capable of displaying *indicative information* including search suggestions to a user derived

15 from searches performed by one or more entities connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said search suggestions include recent searches and/or popular searches performed by said entities.

In one embodiment, said entities are '*user contacts*'.

According to a further aspect, the present invention includes a system providing

20 the user with a private *personal contacts network* of *user contacts*.

As used herein, the term 'entity' or 'entities' refers to any individual, family, personal or *organised network*, organisation, club, society, company, partnership, religion, or entity that exists as a particular and discrete unit.

CLAIMS:

1. A search engine system capable of displaying *indicative information including search suggestions* to a user derived from searches performed by one or more entities connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said search suggestions include recent searches and/or popular searches performed by said entities.
2. A search engine system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said entities are denoted as '*user contacts*'.
3. A search engine system as claimed in claim 2, wherein, each *user contact* includes a *connection factor* indicative of the degree of separation between the *user contact* and the user.
4. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 2-3, wherein at least one user is provided with an interface between said search engine system and with a *private personal contacts network* of *user contacts* unique to said user.
5. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 2-3, including a *private personal contacts network* of *user contacts* accessible by at least one user.
6. A search engine system as claimed in claim 5, wherein each said *private personal contacts network* is unique to an individual user.
7. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-6, wherein said *private personal contacts network* provides *interrelationship context information* between said entities.

8. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-6, wherein said *private personal contacts network provides interrelationship context information* between a *user contact* and the user.
9. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-8, wherein said *interrelationship context information* includes said *connection factor*.
10. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 4-9, wherein said *interrelationship context information* includes one or more *entity attributes*.
11. A search engine system as claimed in claim 10, wherein said system *entity attributes* include at least one *identifying characteristic*.
12. A search engine system as claimed in claim 10, wherein said system *entity attributes* includes information regarding personal details, interests; friends; relations; school alumni; employment factors; business colleagues; professional acquaintances; sexual preferences, persuasions, or proclivities; sporting interests; entertainment, artistic, creative or leisure interests; travel interests, commercial, religious, political, theological or ideological belief or opinions; academic, scientific, or engineering disciplines; humanitarian, social, security/military or economic fields and any combination of same.
13. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said *searches* include any interrogation of a database via a network, including a search of web-sites via the internet.
14. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein each search includes user-inputted *keywords* and an output listing of *search results*.

15. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims 14, wherein said *indicative information* includes recent searches denote recent keywords or search results associated with the keywords used by the user contacts and said popular searches denote a ranking of the most popular keywords or search results associated with the keywords used by the user contacts, search suggestions.
16. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said *indicative information* includes search results weighting.
17. A search engine system as claimed in claim 1514, wherein said suggestions include at least one of:
 - recent web-sites denoting recent web sites accessed by the user contacts either directly, or via recent searches;
 - popular web-sites denoting a ranking of web sites most regularly visited by, and/or recommended by the user contacts;
 - popular searches denoting a ranking of the most popular keywords or search results associated with the keywords used by the user contacts,
 - high-flying searches denoting a list of keywords or search results associated with the keywords ranked according to their rate of increase in the popular searches ranking;
 - high-flying web-sites denoting a list of web-sites ranked according to their rate of increase in the popular web-sites ranking;

popular or recently accessed paid web listings.

18. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 15-17, wherein the *suggestions* are based on a *selective input* from the *user contacts*.
19. A search engine system as claimed in claim 18, wherein said *selective input* is filtered according to at least one *filter criteria* including elapsed period since the *suggestion creation*, the *interrelationship context information*, the *connection factor* and/or *entity attributes* of the *user contact*.
20. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 7-19, wherein said *interrelationship context information* includes a *connection factor* indicative of the separation between *user contacts* in said private personal *contacts network*.
21. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 7-19, wherein, access to the *interrelationship context information* between the user and said entities is restricted.
22. A search engine system as claimed in claim 21, wherein said restricted access is defined by the user.
23. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 11-23, wherein said *identifying characteristic* includes at least one of the group including; the entity's name, means of contacting the entity, including an e-mail address; telephone and/or facsimile number; postal address and/or any communication means capable of individually communicating with the entity or any combination of same.
24. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 11-24, wherein

said *identifying characteristics* includes at least one said *entity attribute*.

25. A search engine system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said *identifying characteristics* include *supplementary attributes* of said user.
26. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein entities agreeing to inclusion in a user's *personal contacts network* are said to be *direct user contacts*.
27. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein two entities linked through any number of intermediate entities are defined as "connected".
28. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein two entities existing independently in a *personal contact network* without any intermediate connecting entities are defined as "disconnected".
29. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 3-28, wherein said *connection factor* includes a *connection path length* between two entities, given by the minimum possible number of connections in a chain of entities separating said two entities.
30. A search engine system as claimed in claim 29, wherein the said *connection factor* is equal to the shortest *connection path length* of all the available *connection paths* between the entities.
31. A search engine system as claimed in claim 29 or 30, wherein an entity that is directly connected to another entity is said to be a *direct contact* giving a "1st degree contact," and has a *connection path length* of one; two entities connected via one intermediate entity are said to be "2nd

degree contacts," and have a *connection path* length of two, and wherein any two entities whose shortest connection path is via "N-1" intermediate entities (if any), with a path length of "N" are an "Nth" degree contact, where "N" is an integer.

32. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 29-31, wherein entities having a 2nd or higher degree contact are termed *indirect contacts*, or indirectly connected.
33. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 29-32, wherein said system is configured to allow a user to apply a *selective input* to the user's *suggestions* by using a *filter criteria* for controlling the Nth degree contact of entities to be included, where N is a variable determined by the user.
34. A search engine system as claimed in claim 33, wherein the *filter criteria* for said *selective input* is linked to a *predetermined activity*.
35. A search engine system as claimed in claim 33, wherein a user engaged in one or more said *predetermined activities* may specify the action to apply to;
 - all degrees of contact in the user's *personal contacts network*, at any *connection path* length, or
 - all *user contacts*, including those disconnected from the user.
36. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 33-35, wherein said *selective input* is receivable from networks outside the system network.

37. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 33-36, wherein said *suggestions* are a weighted average of *direct contacts* and *indirect contacts*.
38. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 33-36, wherein the *selective input* is user-definable.
39. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 15-38, wherein *user contacts* associated with the *suggestions* most frequently chosen by a user are designated *preferred user contacts*.
40. A search engine system as claimed in claim 39, wherein said designation of *preferred user contact* is performed directly by the user, or calculated by the system by determining the *user contact* associated with the most popular *suggestions* previously selected by the user.
41. A search engine system as claimed any one of claims 39-40, wherein the *selective input* may be at least partially weighted by *suggestions* from the *preferred user contacts*.
42. A search engine system as claimed any one of claims 39-40, wherein the *selective input* is varied according to factors associated with the *user contact*, including the *interrelationship context information*, the *connection factor* and/or *entity attributes* associated with the contributing *user contact*.
43. A search engine system as claimed any one of claims 39-42, wherein the *search results* associated with a *keyword* may be weighted according to a *selective input* from the *user contacts*.

44. A search engine system as claimed in claim 43, wherein said selective input from the user contacts, includes filter criteria related to the interrelationship context information, the connection factor and/or entity attributes associated with the user contact.
45. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein a user contact who last performed a search, or recommended a particular web-site/search result is contactable via a link adjacent to the keyword search terms and/or web-sites.
46. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein a partner web-site is given a unique link to the search engine, configured such that users clicking on the search engine link are linked to a search page with the participating partner web-site listed as the top of the popular searches and/or recent web-sites suggestions listing.
47. A search engine system as claimed in claim 46, wherein said partner web-sites include a link to the search engine web-site whereby both web-sites are listed under the suggestions at both websites.
48. A search engine system as claimed in either claim 46 or claim 47, wherein said partner web-site displays a list of suggestions obtained from the generic search activities of all partner web-site users.
49. A search engine system as claimed in either claim 45-46, wherein said partner web-site displays a list of suggestions for users having their own private personal contacts network obtained from the suggestions associated by the activities of their user contacts on the partner web-site.

50. A search engine system as claimed in claims 14-49, wherein on a commercial web-site, a *recommendation* to related products to the *keywords* being searched for which were bought, viewed, subscribed to may be made by previous *user contacts* to the site.
51. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein provided to a user as a toolbar.
52. A search engine system as claimed in claim 51, wherein said tool bar monitors web-sites accessed by the user directly without conducting a *keyword* search as an input to the *suggestions* data and *search weightings*.
53. A search engine system as claimed in claim 51 or claim 52, wherein said tool bar may also display or provide access to the most recent *suggestions* data from the *user contacts*.
54. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 51-53, wherein upon accessing a web-site, the user is optionally notified by the toolbar of their *user contacts* who visited that site.
55. A search engine system as claimed in claim 53, wherein upon accessing a web-site, the user is optionally notified which subsequent sites the *user contact* accessed.
56. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the search engine is configured to provide the user with *notifications* of further specified occurrences, including access of a specified (or book-marked) web-site by a *user contact* and/or an

associated *recommendation* to same, or further sites accessed after the book-marked site, or of any new material at, or links to, the specified site.

57. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the search engine includes means for linking an *appraisal* with a search result and/or *suggestion*.
58. A search engine system as claimed in claim 57, wherein said *appraisal* may include an (optionally graded) *recommendation* and/or *user comments*.
59. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-58, wherein said *appraisals* are performed via links associated with individual results on *search results listing*.
60. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-58, wherein said appraisals are be performed whilst accessing the search result or *suggestion* web-site via a link to the search engine.
61. A search engine system as claimed in claim 58, wherein the *user comments* are unrestricted typed comments and/or selected from a predetermined list of *appraisal gradings*.
62. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-61, wherein said user *recommendations* are used as a factor in *weighting* the *search results*.
63. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 57-61, wherein users are accorded a predetermined number of *recommendations* according to a predetermined user *recommendation credibility* criteria.

64. A search engine system as claimed in claim 63, wherein said *recommendation credibility* may be determined by active or automatic *affirmations* of said user *recommendations* by the *user contacts*.
65. A search engine system as claimed in claim 63, wherein *recommendation credibility* criteria may include a fixed quota of *recommendations* over a specified time period, or linked to particular *entity attributes* for *recommendations* for web-sites associated with said *entity attributes*.
66. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said system is user-configurable to provide the ability for a user to delete *searches* or web-activity from incorporation in said *indicative information*.
67. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein each user is provided with an editable *history log* of previous *searches* they have performed and web-sites accessed.
68. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 15-67, wherein users can submit *recommendations* for sites limited to specific *keywords*.
69. A search engine system as claimed in any one of claims 10-67, wherein the *weighting* of individual *user contacts* may be passively/automatically or actively adjusted based on criteria defined by the user including usefulness of the *user contact's* browsing, reliability of results, personal tastes, and/or any *entity attribute* known to the system.
70. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, incorporating a book-marking system, whereby a user accessing a given web-site may use a book-marking feature on the search engine web-site

to add the bookmarked web-site to a compilation list of other bookmarked sites.

71. A method of *brokering* services utilising a search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, said services being provided by a *partner web-site* or *broker* acting as an intermediary between advertisers and *partner web-sites* and/or websites featuring the search engine system and including the provision of *suggestions* relevant to the advertiser product(s), service(s), web-site(s), or company(ies) on said *partner web-site*, and/or the search engine.
72. A method as claimed in claim 71 wherein a *partner web-site* offers said service directly to advertisers or representatives of advertisers.
73. A method as claimed in claim 71 or claim 72 wherein said offer of *suggestion(s)* to the advertiser is made available to all or a subset of the users of the *partner web-site*.
74. A method as claimed in any one of claims 71–73, wherein said *suggestion(s)* are *recommendations*.
75. A method as claimed in any one of claims 71–74, wherein said *suggestion(s)* would be displayed to those *partner web-site* users who had previously accessed related *suggestion(s)*.
76. A method as claimed in claim 71, wherein said *brokering service* is provided between advertisers and *partner web-sites*.
77. A method as claimed in claim 76, wherein said *partner web-sites* provide access to their users for the displaying of *suggestions* and distribution of

recommendations without said partner web-sites being involved in the selection of advertisers and suggestions

78. A method as claimed in claim 71, wherein said *brokering* service are provided to other *brokers* or companies providing internet-searching advertising, whereby sponsored search results are offered to advertisers at fixed-price or via auction in exchange for providing the advertiser a negotiated ranking position in a *keyword* search results presented to a users performing a search on the *keyword* purchased by the advertiser.
79. A method as claimed in claim 78, wherein said services further include the ability for advertisers to bid for, or buy the rights to be included in *suggestions* to *partner website* users, individual users and/or search engine system users who have previously accessed similar, related or identical *suggestions* or *recommendations*.
80. A search engine system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims 1 - 70 capable of displaying *indicative information* to a user from searches performed by entities (or '*user contacts*') connected directly or indirectly with the user, wherein said system includes:
 - at least one host computer processor connectable to one or more network(s),
 - a database accessible over said network(s),
 - a plurality of data input devices connectable to said network(s),
 - a search engine accessible over said network(s),
 - wherein said system is capable of forming said private personal

contacts network for each of one or more users by receiving input from the said user including at least one identifying characteristic of the user and of one or more chosen entities known to said user,

- recording said identifying characteristic of each entity including the user to form one or more corresponding entity data records in said database,
- notifying the or each chosen entity of their recordal on said system and requesting input of at least one identifying characteristic of one or more further entities known to the or each said chosen entity,
- recording the identifying characteristic of each further entity inputted by the or each said chosen entity to form further corresponding entity data records,
- repeating the above steps of successive notification of further entities and recordal of the identifying characteristic of each further entity chosen as further entity data records,
- providing searchable access to at least part of the entity data records stored in said database and to the internet.

81. A search engine system as claimed in claim 80, wherein said searchable access to an entity data record may be restricted by the entity to said *user contacts*.

82. A search engine system as claimed in claims 80 or claim 81, wherein said data input devices include computer terminals, PDAs, telephones, mobile phones, laptops, notebooks, any other portable personal computing

device connectable to said network.

83. A search engine system as claimed in claim 82, wherein said data input devices provide at least one of webpage, e-mail, text message, DTMF tone, voice or video access to the said host computer or between entities and/or web-browsing access to said host computer via a dedicated website interface.
84. A method of creating a private *personal contacts network* for interaction with a search engine system ~~as described above as claimed in any one of claims 1 – 70 or 80 - 83~~, said method including the steps performed by a processor of a data processing and storage system, of:
 - receiving input from the said user including at least one *identifying characteristic* of the user and at least one chosen entity known to said user and hereinafter referred to as a *user contact*;
 - recording said *identifying characteristic* of each *user contact* including the user to form at least one corresponding *user contact* data record in said database;
 - notifying the or each *user contact* of their recordal on said system and requesting input of at least one identifying characteristic of at least one further entity known to the *user contact*;
 - recording the identifying characteristic of each further entity inputted by the or each *user contact* to form further corresponding *user contact* data records;
 - repeating the above steps of successive notification of further entities and recordal of the identifying characteristic of each further entity

chosen as further *user contact* data records;

providing searchable access to at least part of the *user contact* data records stored in said database.

Search Engine Watch

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Eurekster Launches Personalized Social Search

By Danny Sullivan, Editor

A longer version of this article for Search Engine Watch members looks at how clickthrough refinement has been used in the past, why it failed before and examines how Eurekster creates personalized results.

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Finally, personalized search results seem to have arrived for the masses. Personalized search has long been promised as an important next step for increasing relevancy. Now it comes not from Google or Yahoo but instead from tiny Eurekster, which opens to the general public today. Prior to this, the site had been a beta test involving only a few hundred people over the past couple of months.

Personalized search? The concept has been that by knowing some things about you, a search engine might refine your results to make them more relevant. A teenager searching for music might get different matches than a senior citizen. A man looking for flowers might see different listings than a woman.

Eurekster's twist on this concept is to provide personalized results based not on who you are but who you know. Friends, colleagues and anyone in your Eurekster social network will influence the type of results you see.

"Word of mouth is the most common way we filter information in real life, and Eurekster amplifies this everyday process to deliver search results that matter most to users and their friends and contacts," said Grant Ryan, Eurekster's chief executive officer.

Search Filtered By Friends

For example, take a search for "thunderbirds," the popular Gerry Anderson television show that I loved as a kid and that my children are now enjoying on DVD. Without refinement, Eurekster brings back a variety of results, leading off with the US Air Force Thunderbirds flight team web site.

There's nothing wrong with the US Air Force site coming up first. After all, it's certainly relevant for this search. But I'm thinking of the sci-fi series. Scrolling down, I find the official site for the show listed in position three. By clicking on the site, my interest in it is registered by Eurekster.

Now picture that one of my friends does the same "thunderbirds" search. They'll see different results, based on my actions. The Thundersbirds TV show site moves up to position one, with a little Eurekster "e" icon next to it. That's to alert them that someone in their network likes this site. Since most of my friends are into sci-fi, this search will probably feel more relevant to them.

SearchMates

The potential of using your friends or colleagues is enormous. Imagine Eurekster being used by all the employees of a medical research firm, where many might do similar medical-related queries. With Eurekster, all the employees can be linked together and benefit from the searches and selections made by their colleagues.

Libraries are another institution that might latch on to the Eurekster concept. Librarians are constantly asked by patrons for assistance. Eurekster would allow librarians to collaborate invisibly with each other and share what they've found to be the best for various queries.

There are downsides. Not all of my friends have the same interests as me. In addition, as my social network grows -- because my friends invite their friends and so on -- commonalities that are useful get diluted.

Some type of categorization will almost certainly be necessary. I can imagine dividing my network into subgroups, for example. All my colleagues who cover search would be in one group, my fellow youth group volunteers in another, my friends who live in California in their own and my friends who live in the UK in a fourth. Depending on the search I do, I might want to share and refine my search in some way with a particular group, to benefit from a particular commonality.

Such functionality is coming over the next few months, Eurekster says, as well as the ability to group contacts by interests, such as sports or business. In that way, you can also get a sense of what's hot by those who are into particular subjects.

"You can see what the search results are like with different hats on and do that different categorization," Ryan said.

Sharing Searches, Sites

Eurekster does more than refine your results. It can also show you the things that other people in your network are looking for. So when I searched for "thunderbirds," anyone one else in my network sees that query get listed in the "Your Friends Recent Searches" area in the right-hand column of the Eurekster search results page.

This can be pretty cool. When I saw "Firewire backups on sale" show up in that area, I knew one of my friends was looking for a Firewire backup solution. As it turns out, I'd just bought a similar solution of my own. So, I clicked on the small envelope icon that appeared next to the query. This let me email the person, to say I had info they might be interested in.

My network is incredibly small -- all of three people right now. I had a pretty good idea who had done this search, but I wanted to just test out the functionality. The idea behind it is more of the opposite. If you see a search that someone has done, you can get in touch with that person perhaps to discover what they found.

The email feature only appears for those in your direct network or extended network (where other networks are linked to yours by a common contact). Don't want to get emailed? Then you can opt-out using your account preferences.

I actually thought it might be useful to have an option where you can choose to let anyone email you, even if they aren't part of your network. To me, it could be a great way to build up new people, by spotting queries that you have in common. It could come, but Eurekster is keeping things limited, for the

moment.

"As always, when you start a service, you try to set the default to what you think people would like," Ryan said.

Of course, what your friends look for is supposed to help you more directly, by influencing the actual listings you see when you search for the same thing. So, you needn't email for help. Just search for the same thing that you've seen someone else look for. Any site they liked, as determined by Eurekster, will be flagged with that "e" icon.

Eurekster will also display "Your Friends Recent Sites," which are sites those in your network have recently been to. It also keeps track of the top queries and sites visited by those in your network, as well.

Staying Private

While I love my friends, I don't want them seeing everything I search for. And in a small network like mine, it's pretty easy for others to guess who might have looked for something.

To protect privacy, Eurekster makes it possible to do a "private search" by checking a box below the search box. Do this, and your search will not be shared with others. Should you forget, you can click on a small X symbol that shows up next to any queries you've done, to remove them.

Both opt-out features are welcomed, but I'd still prefer that the default action be that all searches are private. The downside to this is that if people don't remember to share their searches when appropriate, the network doesn't function as it should. However, I think that by making all searches public by default, people will inevitably share material they don't want out there.

It's important to note that your actual name is never displayed alongside a query or a site that was visited. In addition, the larger your network gets, the more anonymous you become. Say you have 30 or more people in your network. Guessing at who did a particular search or visited a particular site becomes harder. Also, a porn filter does prevent porn queries from being displayed, a further bit of protection against some possibly embarrassing queries.

Aside from privacy from your friends, what about privacy in general? Yes, you will get a cookie with a unique user ID, which is the main issue that some have had with other search engines such as Google. Unlike Google and other major search engines, the cookie doesn't last for years. It expires after a year, if you don't revisit Eurekster.

Of course, being cookied with a unique ID or cookied for a long time isn't necessarily a problem, and my [Search Privacy At Google & Other Search Engines](#) article from last year covers this in depth. Instead, Eurekster brings in the entirely different issue also addressed in that article, that you are a known, registered individual (rather than an anonymous cookie ID) and linked to particular searches. That makes it much easier for your data to potentially be abused.

The [How Eurekster Works](#) page provides some assurances about privacy. The company says it won't reveal who did a particular search or visited a particular site. However, I suspect it would do this if legally compelled to. The policy also doesn't address how long your searches are retained. Some like Google Watch and the EFF [believe](#) such data should be destroyed on a regular basis.

Ultimately, anyone with serious concerns about privacy may shy away from the service, something Eurekster recognizes. In order to work properly, it does need to monitor what you search for and what you visit. The company hopes the promise of anonymity and extra tools to explicitly keep some things private will satisfy most concerns.

"To do personalization, we have to have some information, and we give you the ability to delete that information to make it private. In the future, we will give users even more tools by which to further control their data," Ryan said.

Google Replacement Or Enhancement?

Eurekster is not a replacement for Google, Inktomi or other search engines that crawl the web. Indeed, Eurekster has no listings of its own. Instead, it works to refine the results that are provided by others.

When you search on Eurekster, the listings are coming from Yahoo-owned AllTheWeb, which is an excellent search engine. Eurekster then alters those results depending on the choices made by your social network.

Eurekster can also do this for any other search engine, as well. AllTheWeb is being used because the company has an agreement with to use its listings (and also carries Yahoo-owned Overture paid listings, which appear under the Sponsored Search Results heading). Eurekster could strike an agreement with other companies and do the same on their own sites.

"This doesn't replace the algorithmic [crawler-based] results," Ryan said. "We want to partner with anyone and everyone. We see it as an additional layer that adds value."

The company says some search companies have expressed interest, though it wouldn't name any. Eurekster's sister company SLI has a relationship with some smaller search companies, such as Comet Systems, Excite Networks and CNET's Search.com to provide related searches technology. So, perhaps we'll see some movement with these partners first.

Eurekster also sees its system as something that may be of interest to social network web sites. These are places such as LinkedIn, Friendster, Tribe and Rhyz. They let you meet people based on who you already know, and they've been gaining recent attention from the press and surfing public.

"There's lots of people who want to grow their own networks, so we're kind of network agnostic," Ryan said. "We're happy to work with anyone's private network."

Incidentally, it was rumored that Google tried to buy Friendster last year. While that doesn't seem to have panned out, Google perhaps is still interested in starting a social network of its own. Evidence? Try a search for social networks on Google and notice that an ad for jobs at Google comes up. Is it recruiting? If so, I didn't find any jobs explicitly mentioning this.

If not social networking, we certainly know that Google has a number of personalization technologies at its disposal. Google bought Kaltix last year, a start-up company of three people that attracted attention by promising undisclosed advances in personalized search. Back in 2001, Google acquired Outride, another firm experimenting with personalized search results.

Choose Your Engine?

One feature I'd love to see is the ability to use Eurekster with your favorite search engine. I think it would help in getting people to try it. Those comfortable with Google, for example, might want to run Eurekster "on top" of Google's results.

Such a thing will require Eurekster to strike new agreements, and it doesn't have one with Google, for the moment. But the company did express interest in my idea that perhaps it could let users make use of their own Google API keys, in order to legitimately call Google's results into Eurekster. If this happens, I'll pass along more details.

Will Personalization Fly?

I started out by calling Eurekster tiny, but the company has a wealth of search refinement experience. Go back in time to GlobalBrain, which was a promising search technology that I wrote about in 1998. GlobalBrain was founded by brothers Grant and Shaun Ryan. Snap -- then later called NBCi -- bought GlobalBrain but failed to take the technology forward as the company pulled back from search in the wake of the dotcom crash.

The Ryans bought back the GlobalBrain technology and founded SLI Systems. As mentioned, SLI systems has been using it so far to provide related search functionality to a number of minor search sites, handling 300 million queries per month, the company says. Now SLI is one of the cofounding companies behind Eurekster (the other being social networking company RealContacts, also founded by the Ryans).

Will the second time out be lucky for the Ryans? It remains to be seen. But one thing's for certain. Unlike back in 1999, the majors are showing a real interest in personalized search.

Google (see News.com), Yahoo (see Wall Street Journal) and AOL (see Search Engine Watch) have all made public statements that they view personalization as a vital step forward in improving search -- and as mentioned earlier, Google even owns at least two companies, Kaltix and Outride, that were involved with it.

Eurekster is first out of the block for 2004, but we'll likely see the others follow, in some way. Past issues about privacy and user resistance will remain, (see Google May Get Personal & Searching for the personal touch), but there appears the will on the part of the majors to solve these issues.

Search Headlines

NOTE: Article links often change. In case of a bad link, use the publication's search facility, which most have, and search for the headline.

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